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New and less known birds from Libya

by Bruno Massa

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Birds of Libya are less well known than those living in other north African countries. Since Bundy's (1976) review, few papers on the birds of Libya have been published: Misonne (1973), Willcox & Willcox (1978), Cowan (1982, 1983, 1985), Meininger *et al.* (1994a, 1994b, 1996). Between 4 and 16 April 1998, I visited coastal Libya and the following are the most notable records among the 89 species observed during the return trip from the Tunisia-Libya to the Libya-Egypt frontier.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE *Elanus caeruleus*

One migrating W-E near New Al Hishah on 5 April. Previously not reported for Libya (Bundy 1976), but well known as breeding in Tunisia and Egypt.

LAPPET-FACED VULTURE *Torgos tracheliotus*

One pair between Tokrah and Tolmeita on 7 April; 1 individual larger, presumably the female, rested on a high tension pylon, the other flew over and performed a spectacular display, diving rapidly towards it

and emitting a guttural whistle. Afterwards both soared together towards the Djebel el Akhdar, mountains of modest altitude, extensively wooded by *Juniperus phoenicea*, *Pistacia lentiscus*, *Arbutus parvari*, *Quercus calliprimos* and *Cupressus sempervirens*. The area is characterized by deep wadis and isolated hills, where sheep and goat grazing are widespread. According to Del Hoyo *et al.* (1994) this species in Africa lays in December-February, breeding both in steppes, savannas and woodland; considering their behaviour, the vultures observed by me may have been breeding in the area. Previous records for Libya are in Fezzan and refer to singles (Bundy 1976). The nearest populations live in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994).

HARRIERS *Circus* spp.

Contrary to what was reported by Bundy (1976), harriers seem to migrate commonly through Libya; altogether I observed *c.* 200 individuals of different species (12 *Circus aeruginosus*, 40 *Circus cyaneus*, 6 *Circus macrourus*, 68 *Circus pygargus*, and 65 unidentified), mostly migrating singly, all eastwards; according to my observations carried out in the Benghazi region, huge numbers of harriers fly over the sea to reach the island of Crete, where an important spring migration route has been recorded by Vagliano (1985).

LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD *Buteo rufinus*

One at Al Beyda on 7 April; 1 at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April. Djebel el Akhdar is probably one of the few areas of Libya where this species breeds, although there is no proof yet.

BONELLI'S EAGLE *Hieraetus fasciatus*

One ad. observed next to its large nest in a narrow cave on a cliff of Wadi el Kouf on 8 April; this site lies in the only known breeding area of this species in Libya (Bundy 1976).

LESSER KESTREL *Falco naumanni*

27 pairs at Wadi el Kouf (2 breeding in nests of *Corvus corax*) on 8 April; 1 at Apollonia on 9 April; a small colony on sea cliffs at Tajura on 14 April. At Wadi el Kouf I found some nests with fledglings aged *c.* 15 days; allowing for 28 days incubation, laying must have occurred in late March, following arrival at the breeding sites in February, but the possibility of wintering is not excluded. Breeding in the Benghazi region has not been recorded by previous authors (Bundy 1976; Negro 1997).

LANNER FALCON *Falco biarmicus tanypterus*

One at Al Beyda on 7 April; one pair breeding in an old nest of *Corvus corax* at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April.

LAUGHING DOVE *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Pairs seen and breeding recorded in many towns and their neighbourhoods (Sabratah, Tripoli, Leptis Magna, Misratah, Sirt,

Benghazi, Marada, Tokrah, Dernah, At Tamimi, Tobruk, Ajadabia). My observations confirm the expansion of this species through N Libya, already recorded by Meininger *et al.* (1994b, 1996).

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Eight fresh characteristic pellets of this species (together with two feathers), recently regurgitated from a nocturnal roost at Leptis Magna on 5 April, contained 10 skulls of *Gerbillus* sp. and *Rattus rattus*. Breeding in Libya has yet to be confirmed.

ALPINE SWIFT *Apus melba*

One active colony at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April. Djebel el Akhdar is the only area of Libya where this species breeds (Bundy 1976).

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*

One pair near New Al Hishah on 5 April; some between Sirt and Benghazi on 6 April; one pair at Benghazi on 6 April; some singing at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April; 2 at Dernah on 10 April; some near At Tamimi on 12 April; one 100 km W of Ajadabia on 13 April; 2 pairs at Sabratah on 15 April. Males singing on Djebel el Akhdar suggest that breeding there is likely.

HOOPOE LARK *Alaemon alaudipes*

5 males displaying between Tobruk and Ajadabia (70 km from Ajadabia) on 13 April. Meininger *et al.* (1994b) consider that it is likely to breed all along the south coast of Libya.

LESSER SHORT-TOED LARK *Calandrella rufescens*

One colony near At Tamimi on 10 April; one colony between Tobruk and At Tamimi on 12 April; many between Tobruk and Ajadabia on 13 April. Two of the above listed localities are along the coast of Benghasi region, where Bundy (1976) did not mention breeding.

CRAG MARTIN *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

One colony at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April; 2 at Apollonia on 9 April. Benghasi region is the only area of Libya where this species breeds (Bundy 1976).

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Many singing at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April; three males singing at Cyrene on 9 April. According to Bundy (1976), Djebel el Akhdar is the only area of Libya where this species breeds, but it is probably expanding in some suitable coastal areas of the Benghasi region.

BLACK WHEATEAR *Oenanthe leucura*

3 pairs at Leptis Magna on 5 April, males displaying; 4 near New Al Hishah on 5 April. In Libya it has been recorded as breeding only on Djebel Nafusa (Tripolitania) (Bundy 1976).

SPECTACLED WARBLER *Sylvia conspicillata*

2 pairs (males singing from a bush of *Atriplex halimus*, 1 nest with 2 eggs just laid) in the salt marsh W of At Tamimi on 12 April. Breeding in Libya has not been previously confirmed (Bundy 1976).

SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE *Lanius meridionalis*

Many pairs breeding between Sirt and Benghazi, particularly between Ben Jawwad and Ajadabia on 6 April; some pairs between Tokrah and Tolmeita on 7 April; some pairs near Dernah on 10 April, near At Tamimi on 10 April, at Tobruk on 10–11 April; some near Ajadabia and Ras Lanuf, and many pairs 50 Km E of Sirt on 13 April. I agree with Meininger *et al.* (1996), who consider its breeding range continuous along coastal Libya. According to Lefranc (1993) the diet of this north African species is chiefly insectivorous. In 40 pellets that I collected under three roosts near Dernah, the following percentage of prey items were found: 65% Coleoptera, Tenebrionidae (genera *Adesmia*, *Pimelia*, *Akis* and *Blaps*), 35% Coleoptera, Buprestidae (*Julodis onopordi*).

BROWN-NECKED RAVEN *Corvus ruficollis*

Some pairs breeding on pylons near Misratah, 1 nest on pylons every 8–10 km near New Al Hishah on 5 April; one pair between Ben Jawwad and Ajadabia, some pairs breeding on pylons near Marada on 6 April; 2 pairs between Tobruk and Ajadabia, some W of Ajadabia, and 2 at Ras Lanuf on 13 April. The high tension line with high pylons was built 5–6 years ago, giving an artificial breeding site to this desert species, which is now expanding northwards in the arid zones of coastal Libya, where it was absent in the past (Bundy 1976).

COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax*

One pair in a nest near Al Beyda on 7 April; another pair in a nest at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April; one pair at Cyrene on 9 April' another at Tobruk on 11 April.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Some pairs breeding at Marada on 6 April, between Tobruk and Ajadabia on 13 April, and at Ras Lanuf on 13 April. These localities are outside of the known breeding range of this species in Libya (cf. Bundy 1976; Meininger *et al.* 1994b, 1996).

EUROPEAN SERIN *Serinus serinus*

Some males singing at Leptis Magna on 5 April, at Wadi el Kouf on 8 April, at Cyrene on 9 April, at Misratah on 14 April and at Sabratah on 15 April. Breeding in Libya was considered confined to Tripolitania; records from the Benghasi region show that this species is expanding in Libya, as observed in other Mediterranean areas.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Commonly seen at Sabratah, Homs, Leptis Magna, between Sirt and Benghazi, Al Beyda, Cyrene and Apollonia. Breeding of this species in Libya has been certainly overlooked.

CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*

2 males singing at Al Beyda on 7 April; *c.* 50 pairs in the salt marsh E of At Tamimi on 10 April (one nest with 3 eggs); *c.* 80 pairs in the salt marsh W of At Tamimi on 12 April (one nest with 5 eggs). These are the first confirmed breeding records of this species in Libya.

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Notes on the reproductive behaviour and the nest of the Chestnut-bellied Euphonia (*Euphonia pectoralis*)

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The Chestnut-bellied Euphonia (*Euphonia pectoralis*) is a tanager of southeastern South America, with its major distribution centred in the tropical lowland and montane evergreen forests of southeastern Brazil